

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 AF-08 ISO-00 OES-06 AID-05 IO-13 OMB-01 ACDA-07

EB-07 COME-00 TRSE-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-02

INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15

USIA-06 EUR-12 /116 W

----- 105167

R 030700Z SEP 76

FM AMEMBASSY PORT LOUIS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 6129

INFO AMEMBASSY DAR ES SALAAM

AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI

AMEMBASSY LUSAKA

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PFOR PINT MP IN

SUBJECT: INDIRA GANDHI TO VISIT MAURITIUS

1. DR. KARAN SINGH, INDIAN MINISTER OF HEALTH AND FAMILY PLANNING, CONFIRMED AT A PRESS CONFERENCE SEPTEMBER 2 THAT PRIME MINISTER INDIRA GANDHI WILL VISIT MAURITIUS IN OCTOBER. DR. SINGH HEADED THE INDIAN DELEGATION TO THE SECOND WORLD HINDI CONVENTION AND MET THE PRESS PRIOR TO RETURNING TO INDIA VIA EAST AFRICA. HE SAID MRS. GANDHI WOULD ALSO VISIT ZAMBIA AND TANZANIA.

2. ASKED BY A JOURNALIST WHETHER MRS. GANDHI'S VISIT WOULD NOT CONSTITUTE AN INTERFERENCE IN THE INTERNAL POLITICAL AFFAIRS OF MAURITIUS, SINCE THE COUNTRY IS PREPARING FOR PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS TO BE HELD SHORTLY, DR. SINGH SAID SUCH INVOLVEMENT WOULD BE CONTRARY TO INDIAN GOVERNMENT POLICY, MRS. GANDHI HAD BEEN INVITED PERSONALLY BY THE GOM, AND MAURITIUS IS A SOVEREIGN, INDEPENDENT STATE.

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3. IN RESPONSE TO SEVERAL QUESTIONS REGARDING THE EMERGENCY

MEASURES TAKEN BY THE GOI, DR. SINGH SAID THE GREAT MAJORITY OF THE INDIAN PEOPLE HAD "HEADED A SIGH OF RELIEF" WHEN THE STATE OF EMERGENCY WAS INSTITUTED "BECAUSE CERTAIN PEOPLE WERE BENT ON DESTROYING THE ECONOMY." DR. SINGH CRITICIZED THE WESTERN PRESS FOR CONDUCTING A "VILIFYING CAMPAIGN" IN ALLEGING THAT INDIA "IS ON THE WAY TO DICTATORSHIP" AND SAID THIS HAPPENED WHENEVER AN INDEPENDENT STATE "TRIES TO FLY WITH ITS OWN WINGS". THE MINISTER TURNED ASIDE A QUESTION ABOUT THE "SALE OF DIEGO GARCIA" BY SAYING THAT INDIA WISHES THE INDIAN OCEAN TO BE A ZONE OF PEACE.

4. COMMENT: DR. SINGH'S CONFIRMATION OF MRS. GANDHI'S VISIT WILL END SPECULATION ABOUT IF AND WHEN IT WILL TAKE PLACE. THE DATE COMMONLY MENTIONED IS OCTOBER 8. OSTENSIBLE PURPOSE OF HER VISIT IS TO DEDICATE THE MAHATMA GANDHI INSTITUTE, WHICH GOI HELPED FINANCE. REASON FOR INTENSE INTEREST IN HER VISIT HERE IS BELIEF THAT RULING LABOR PARTY INTENDS TO CAPITALIZE ON IT TO BOOST ITS ELECTORAL PROSPECTS, SINCE INDIAN LEADER'S PRESENCE IS EXPECTED TO STIR EMOTIONS OF INDO-MAURITIANS WHO FORM BULK OF LABOR PARTY'S HISTORICAL CONSTITUENCY. OPPOSITION NATURALLY LOOKS ASKANCE AT THIS OBVIOUS APPEAL TO COMMUNALISM.
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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: CHIEF OF STATE VISITS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 03 SEP 1976
Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: ShawDG
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1976PORTL00791
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: N/A
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D760335-0403
From: PORT LOUIS
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1976/newtext/t19760992/aaaadbgu.tel
Line Count: 84
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION NEA
Original Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 2
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: n/a
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: ShawDG
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 09 JUN 2004
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <09 JUN 2004 by buchant0>; APPROVED <13 OCT 2004 by ShawDG>
Review Markings:

Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
04 MAY 2006

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: INDIRA GANDHI TO VISIT MAURITIUS
TAGS: PFOR, PINT, MP, IN, ZA, TZ, (GANDHI, INDIRA)
To: STATE
Type: TE
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 04 MAY 2006